

To: Committee on Ways and Means  
From: Sean Furniss  
11094 Saffold Way  
Reston, VA 20190  
703-481-5899  
[Sean.Furniss@gmail.com](mailto:Sean.Furniss@gmail.com)  
Hearing on Social Security's Death Records

This letter is written in response to the Chairman Sam Johnson's announcement of a subcommittee hearing on the accuracy and uses of the Social Security Administration's Death Master File to take place on 2 February 2012.

The very limited opportunity for groups and individuals to present testimony for the administrative record for the hearing is lamentable. Given the extensive time periods that Congress makes Federal agencies provide the public to review and comment on documents and regulations, one would think that members of the Ways and Means Committee would be the first to understand the need for sufficient amount of time to review, understand and discuss proposed legislation in an open forum.

While Congress is very clear in mandating that Federal agencies use simple English to provide a clear and precise understanding of proposed regulations, the information provided by the Committee related to the proposed bill (HR 3475) fails to provide a clear and precise understanding of the full effects of what would happen under this bill if it were to actually pass and be signed into law.

Congress needs to focus on measures that will target the criminal activities, improve interagency cooperation, improve the tax refund process, and provide the Social Security Administration sufficient funding to address any deficiencies in maintaining the DMF and not just think that eliminating public use of the DMF would solve everything at no cost.

Of the three House and one Senate bill drafted to address problems with the quality and maintenance of the Death Master File (DMF), HR 3475 is clearly the most seriously misdirected of the proposed legislative proposals.

HR 3475 does not clearly address what the Committee believes is needed to be accomplished nor use the best, most effective way to do so. HR 3475, as it is currently written, would effectively end general public access to the DMF. The thinking that this legislation would improve the quality of the DMF and reduce crime appears muddled and confused.

The thought that access to the social security numbers of all dead individuals with social security numbers (not just dead American taxpayers as stated by Chairman Johnson) is a significant cause of identity theft and that keeping social security numbers of "deceased" individuals from being public would help reduce

the erroneous entry of the numbers of living individuals in the database by the Social Security Administration is unfounded in fact.

Rarely has it been documented that the information in this database has been used to for identity theft. If the Committee truly thought that identity theft is a critical issue, then perhaps some thought should be given as to how to better protect the personal information that has been routinely stolen from government and corporate databases (over 500 million stolen according to a 2009 report).

Among the problems with including and resolving problems of having living individuals included in the DMF is an inadequate level of funding and error checking at all levels of government. Without adequate human resources and computerized cross-checking errors within the DMF can not be realistically addressed in an efficient manner.

The information in the DMF is used to create the Social Security Death Index which is used by financial and insurance industries, law enforcement agencies, medical researchers, retirement funds, tax assessment offices, loan companies, courts and many others.

Additionally over 9.1 million Americans make use of the information from the DMF to trace their family histories and create medical histories. Reliable medical family histories are increasing requested by medical professionals at all levels of practice.

I urge the members and staff of the Committee to reassess what needs to be accomplished and to develop a more reasonable and practical method to address those needs.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposed legislation.

Sean Furniss  
11094 Saffold Way  
Reston, Virginia